

servant tirelessly devoted to improving the health and safety of the community. For the past decade, Linda Vail has served as Health Officer for Ingham County, overseeing more than 400 employees, an annual budget of more than \$50 million, and a network of health centers. And she's done so by always keeping science and justice at the forefront, with a no-nonsense, analytical approach. This, even as she faced extreme challenges brought on by a global pandemic, social upheaval, and the politicization of the field she so loves.

But it all began with a girl and a chemistry kit. Growing up in suburban Atlanta, a young Linda Vail was fortunate to have parents who nurtured her love of science. After excelling in all scientific endeavors in high school, Vail went on to earn a bachelor's degree in microbiology from the University of Georgia. Four years later, she arrived in Kalamazoo, Michigan as a researcher for pharmaceutical giant Upjohn. In 1996, she earned a Master's degree in public health administration at Western Michigan University, which led to her first public service position in emergency preparedness at Kalamazoo County's Health Department. She was soon promoted to deputy health officer, and then in 2006 to the role of health officer.

Her disaster preparation skills and studies were quickly put to the test when, in 2010, a pipeline rupture on the Kalamazoo River resulted in one of the largest inland oil spills in U.S. history. It was the efforts and advocacy of Linda and her team that kept that toxic sludge from reaching Lake Michigan, mixing with superfund sites, and multiplying the disaster into an all-out ecological and health catastrophe.

She joined the Ingham County Health Department shortly after, and became Health Officer in 2014. Under her tenure, Vail has brought a holistic, equity-based approach to the role and to the community. From greenlighting clean syringe exchange programs, to securing federal funds for gun violence prevention groups, and advocating for a declaration of racism as a public health crisis, Linda has constantly sought to amplify and expand the definition of what it means for a community to be healthy.

I came to know Linda as she skillfully led the county's response to the COVID-19 pan-

demic. She was the clear, concise, voice that calmly cut through the chaos, and I am so grateful for the way she always made herself available to me and my team. In early 2021, I joined her alongside volunteers to support a drive through vaccination clinic at Michigan State University, an experience I will never forget, and one made possible by her professionalism and advocacy.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Linda Vail's exemplary leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic saved countless lives in mid-Michigan, but it was not without a toll on her own. As she now steps back from the pressures of public health in an effort to focus on her own well-being, I salute her extraordinary devotion to reducing disparities, eliminating inequities, and creating a healthier, more just community for all. I wish her all the best in retirement and offer my gratitude for her long and fruitful career, and for her service above self.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF NORWICH NEW YORK FIREFIGHTER ZACHARY MINER

HON. MARCUS J. MOLINARO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 17, 2023

Mr. MOLINARO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the career of Norwich firefighter Zachary Miner, who recently retired from the Norwich Fire Department after 20 years of dedicated service. Throughout his career, Zach has demonstrated a strong commitment to public service by ensuring the safety of his community.

Zach joined the Norwich Fire Department in December of 2002 and received his EMT certification two years later. Since his certification, he has treated thousands of patients and become a role model and teacher for others in his department.

In 2014, Zach was honored with the Firefighter of the Year Award and American Red Cross "Real Hero's Award" after heroically rescuing an adult trapped in a garage fire. His contributions and service to the Norwich community will not be forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues in the House join me in recognizing the career of

Norwich Firefighter Zachary Miner, a hard-working and dedicated public servant with an unwavering commitment to keeping Upstate New Yorkers safe.

HONORING MERCHON GREEN AS A DISTINGUISHED LEADER IN CENTRAL FLORIDA FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH

HON. DARREN SOTO

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 17, 2023

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Speaker, Merchon Green is a graduate of Florida State University where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems and a minor in communications. She also earned a Juris Doctorate in Law from Southern University Law Center.

Merchon is the founder of MDG Advisory Group, a full-service consulting firm, and Pioneering Change, Inc., a community advocacy organization dedicated to equity and equality. Merchon founded Pioneering Change, Inc. in March of 2017 after a series of murders in the Gifford community. Pioneering Change, Inc. works to unify citizens, educate them to increase self-sufficiency, and equip them with strategies to advocate for themselves, as well as employ ways to better their communities.

Merchon has served on numerous committees advocating for equity, equality, and representation for the underserved. From 2018 to 2020, Merchon served as the chairperson for the School District of Indian River County's Federal Court Mandated Equity Committee, where she oversaw the district's compliance with the 1967 Desegregation Order, as well as made policy, program, and service recommendations to remedy inequities in the School District of Indian River County.

Today, she is the City of Orlando's first equity official and is working to ensure that all residents feel equally valued, equally protected, and have equitable access to opportunities in the City Beautiful.